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No Working Smoke Alarms in North Andover Fatal Fire

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan and North Andover Fire Chief William V. Dolan both lamented the tragic loss of life in a fatal fire that took the life of a well-loved school teacher. According to Chief Dolan, "All indications are that the battery-operated smoke alarms in the home did not work. The firefighters who entered the building noted that there were no detectors sounding in the smoke-filled residence."

The North Andover Fire Department and the Office of the State Fire Marshal are jointly investigating last week's fire at 777 Johnson Street. Investigators are focusing on an accidental cause but have not made a final determination.

Smoke Alarms Are the First Line of Defense

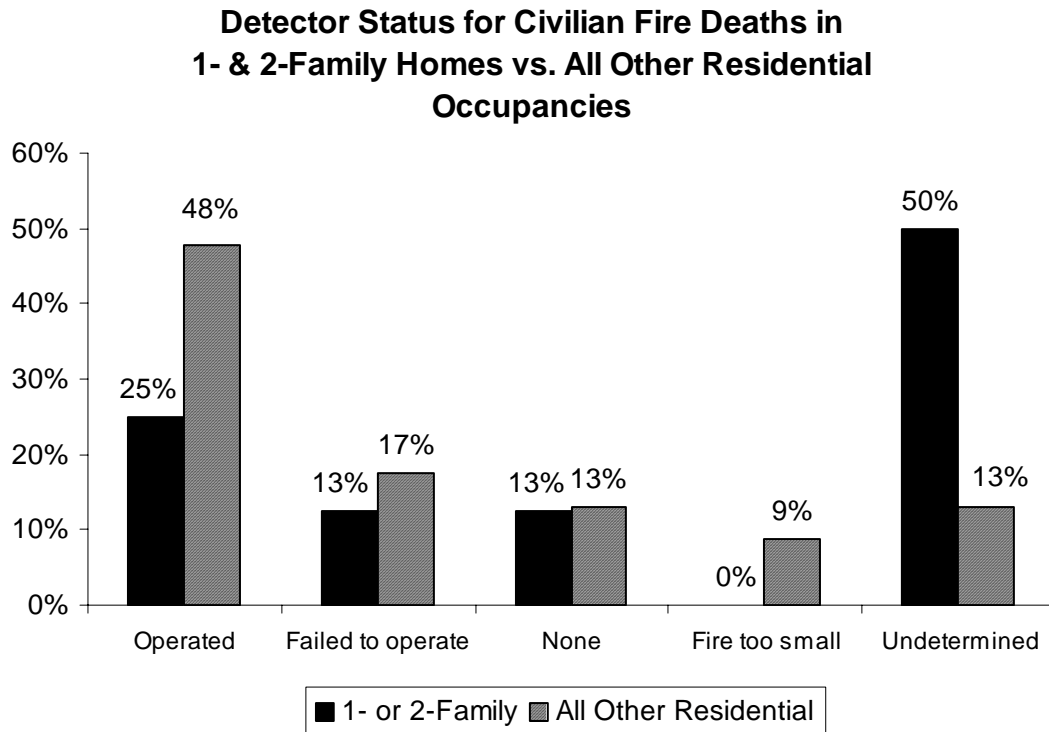
"Smoke alarms are your first line of defense in a fire," said Coan, "A working smoke alarm can double your chance of surviving a fire. It is amazing in this day and age that in a fatal fire after a fatal fire we still find smoke alarms that don't work or in some cases no smoke alarms at all."

Two weeks prior to the fire the North Andover Fire Department had displayed the "Change your Clock, Change your Batteries" banners from the front of each station in preparation for the change to daylight savings time. This is a biannual event for the department. Dolan said, "I want to take this opportunity to ask every citizen of North Andover to test each of their smoke alarms and make sure they are working. If you cannot remember the last time you changed the batteries, install fresh ones now."

Most Fatal Fires Occur in the Home and One-Quarter Without Working Detectors

According to the Massachusetts Fire Incident Reporting System (MFIRS) managed by the Office of the State Fire Marshal, 92% of all fire deaths occur in the home, and more occur in 1- and 2-family homes than anywhere else. In more than a quarter of all fatal home fires in 2003, there was no working smoke alarm.

Studies show that a person's sense of smell goes to sleep when they do. Many people falsely believe they will wake up in a fire when in fact the toxic gases like carbon monoxide will only put you in a deeper sleep.



Home Fire Drills

A smoke alarm will give you the time you need to use your home escape plan and get out safely. Be prepared to react instead of thinking fire won't happen to you.

Both Marshal Coan and Chief Dolan believe that it is important to hold home fire drills. It is not enough to have a plan with two ways out of every room and a meeting place outside. Every family must practice it to make sure it will work.

For more information on fire safety on-line, please check the Department of Fire Services' webpage at www.mass.gov/dfs/ and click on fire safety topics.